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FM AMEMBASSY HANOI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2472
INFO RUEHHS/ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHHM/AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY PRIORITY 1390
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2473
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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 HANOI 001535

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/22/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [HUMANR](#) [VM](#)
SUBJECT: VIETNAMESE PROTESTANTS WARY OF / EXPEL POLITICAL
DISSIDENT DAI NGUYEN FROM CHURCH LEADERSHIP

REF: A. A) HANOI 1320
[1](#)B. B) HANOI 1520

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Classified By:
ACTING POL/C BENJAMIN MOELING, REASON 1.5 (B) and (D)

[1](#)1. (S) SUMMARY. In early June, Hanoi Protestants expelled activist political dissident Lawyer Dai Nguyen from their church executive board because of concerns that his recent political activities would damage church interests. They also suspect that, at the worst, he may be a GVN agent provocateur. At the very least they consider him "unreliable." Their suspicions track with some of our and the international communities' own concerns, though Dai has recently taken some extremely provocative actions to call attention to human rights issues in Vietnam. Regardless of Dai's actual allegiances, he is a polarizing figure and our meetings with him severely provoke the GVN. We will continue to keep a healthy distance from Dai for the time being. End Summary.

ECVN Expels Lawyer Dai

[1](#)2. (S) On June 14, Poloff met with Evangelical Church of Vietnam North (ECVN) General Secretary Au Quang Vinh. In addition to covering other subjects (Septel), Poloff asked Vinh for an assessment of the recent activities of Lawyer Dai Nguyen in support of the new Democratic Party of Vietnam (DPV) (Ref A). Vinh stated that Dai is "not a reliable person." Though Dai is a member of the ECVN's Hanoi congregation, his political activities are "damaging to Church interests." The ECVN board recently told him to stop his activities, but Dai has ignored this request. The ECVN is considering unspecified punitive steps against him in the name of the Church, Vinh said.

[1](#)3. (S) Vinh explained that ECVN leaders have serious questions about Dai as a person and as a political and religious advocate. In the worst case scenario, Dai may be a Ministry of Public Security (MPS) or other GVN security plant placed to spy on and discredit nascent political and religious movements, Vinh warned. He noted that as an agent provocateur, Dai is ideally placed to do both jobs because he has created an important niche for himself at the intersection of religious freedom and political reform advocates in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, and with overseas Vietnamese advocacy groups (such as Boat People SOS which is currently funneling USD 30,000 in NED funding to Dai, s training efforts) Ref A). Dai is also a trusted contact of

many churches in the United States and has apparently received additional funding from some of them for his political activities. In the best case scenario, Dai may be only a risk-taker who endangers more cautious advocates of reform with his recent aggressive and deliberate taunting of the government, Vinh said.

14. (S) In Vinh's opinion the worst case scenario is supported by the fact that though Dai has been very active with the DPV and religious freedom advocacy, including publishing several incendiary stories on the internet, he has not been imprisoned. By comparison, cyber-dissident Dr. Pham Hong Son has been in prison for espionage for several years primarily for translating a State Department pamphlet on democracy, while Dai has published original political statements on the Vietnamese Language BBC and on Viet Kieu websites dedicated to overthrowing the GVN, Vinh noted.

15. (S) Vinh said that on June 13, the ECVN board formally decided to remove Dai as the ECVN legal advisor. ECVN President and Dai booster Pastor Phung Quang Huyen was not happy with this decision, but ultimately agreed with the rest of the ECVN leaders. Pastor Huyen and Pastor Vinh are barely on speaking terms over Dai and several other issues, but the final straw for Huyen was Dai's use of a letter of introduction signed by Huyen during Dai's recent trip to the United States. Dai reportedly used this letter to develop a relationship with Boat People SOS and other Viet Kieu organizations, and as credentials for his meetings with USG officials and with NED. Huyen never intended to give Dai any such entree in the United States by signing such a document, said Vinh.

Comment

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16. (S) Vinh's suspicions track with our own and ConGen HCMC's concerns about Lawyer Dai. Though he may be a legitimate political and religious advocate, his continued freedom and unhindered travel abroad is a wonder, especially given some of his recent "near misses" with police raids of DPV and other activist meetings. There are too many stories of Dai leaving just before or arriving just after an MPS raid not to raise a few eyebrows. Other western diplomats who have met with Dai often, particularly the French and Australians, have similar suspicions. The British are less convinced that Dai is anything more than a naive neophyte on the dissident scene.

17. (S) Comment Cont.: If Vinh's worst case scenario is true and Dai is an MPS agent provocateur, we are hard pressed to identify a reason for his recent visibly aggressive political activities, as they would seem to run counter to an operation to gather information on domestic and U.S.-based political reform and religious freedom advocates. It may be that Dai has bought himself a certain amount of insurance somehow, possibly by reliably informing MPS of his and his associates' activities. It is important to note that though Dai's frequent reporting on DPV activity and developments by e-mail to the diplomatic community has slackened over the last two weeks, he has continued to call attention to other human rights developments. Most sensationally, on June 20, he published a report of the beating of several Protestants in Thanh Hoa on June 18 (Ref B) on the internet with the inclusion of graphic photographs. This report may well be his most provocative act to date, given the GVN's sensitivity over the issue of religious freedom as a PNTR vote looms in Congress and as Vietnam works to convince us to remove the Country of Particular Concern designation before the President's visit in November. It is hard to see how an agent provocateur would profit by such an action.

18. (S) Comment Cont.: Whatever the case may be, it is likely the GVN knows that Dai has received NED and exile funding,

and that he maintains a prominent position among the DPV leadership. Regardless of Dai's actual allegiances, he is a polarizing figure and our meetings with him severely provoke the GVN. Consequently, we will continue to keep a healthy distance from Dai for the foreseeable future.

MARINE